

The Diffuse Capacity for Initiative and Collective Intelligence

When fully reconstructed and once traditional definitions are broken with, and all facets of post-initial learning grasped, the field of adult learning takes a major part on national education scenes. The number of adults joining organised learning activities exceeds, in many countries, the total number of young people registered in initial education, all levels included. The social demand for organised learning among the adult population is growing, and a rapid but fragmented development of educational responses can be observed in all regions of the world.

Despite very significant differences among countries, sectors and milieus, global trends are emerging making lifelong learning an unavoidable issue. Profound changes have taken place that have made many governments and regional intergovernmental organisations adopt adult and lifelong policies. Here in Ireland, after a Green Paper and a White Paper, a governmental policy has been adopted with many features, that has made your country a leading one in the world.

But we still need to ask ourselves why more and more women and men aspire, through organised learning, to a greater autonomy of action? What are the transformations that drive economic and social agencies to allocate resources to adult education and training within the current generation of adults? These questions have to be raised because the investment in adult learning is still, in so many countries including the leading ones, regarded as a venture that can wait, a priority that can suffer delay or pause. These questions have to be raised because the investment in people is still too often looked at as less urgent than the investment in technology and machinery. We need to look at these questions because investment in people's abilities and intelligence necessitates persistent investment, needs to be looked at as allocation of resources indispensable for going through economic crisis, for increasing the social, cultural and economic capacity and creativity of a community. The diffuse capacity for initiative of people, the expansion of the right to learn throughout one's life, has become a condition of human survival across all areas of activity. But the conditions for such active learning societies have to be urgently put in place.

From that perspective, which has become critical for efficient advocacy, I will develop briefly four points: (1) Learning demand and learning rights at work, (2) Rising learning aspirations outside the area of work, (3) The difficult expression of learning aspirations among the adult population, (4) Inequalities in lifelong learning.

(1) Learning demand and learning rights at work

The rapid growth of the learning demand over the last two decades is certainly related to the rise in the general level of initial education within the adult population (Doray and Rubenson 1997) and to the modification of relationships between working time and non-working time (Meda 2000; Sue 1994). The rise in adult learning provision is, however, mainly associated with requirements related to the transformation of modes and techniques of production (OCDE 2000) and to acceleration of commercial exchanges and its impact on competition, productivity and continuing professional development in the active population. It is in knowledge-intensive sectors and at the higher occupational levels that this growth in demand mainly takes place (Brown and Lauder 2001; Belanger and Valvidielso 1997; Brown, Reich and Stern 1993), until

recently most apparent in high tech specialised production and the most computerised sectors of the service industry, in sectors where the tendency towards flexibility of production (Piore and Sabel 1984; Lash and Urry 1994) calls into question repetitive work methods and requires greater competency and autonomy.

The dynamics of reflexive economies and societies (Beck 1992; Giddens 1994; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994) strive toward empowerment of the worker and more freedom of initiative vis-à-vis the structures (Lash and Urry 1994); where the individual's need to take the initiative meets his or her search for identity (Olivier 1995; Saintsaulieu 1995) and the demands of the new economy. Taking into account this new trend, we can better understand in different contexts (regions, professional categories and sectors) the current development of life long learning strategies. Continuing training has become, over the past decades, a major component of work practices and policies.

This trend is not exclusive to the so-called new economy. In the commercial sectors, the comparative advantages of firms stem more and more from the increased competence of their salespersons becoming specialised advisors. In banks, free from technical functions now being undertaken by automated machines, the staff are becoming more involved in individualised relations with the public, listening and offering advice. In food production, employees are also required to change their approach to meet the new quality standards requested by international quality control boards. The globalised national economies have to invest in the development of people as the most critical resource for productivity. And productivity, the capacity to improve the way in which we produce goods and services, is not productivism, which sees economic growth as an end in itself. The issue then about productivity is to recognise the one who produces, you and I and all people, as subjects whose creativity and autonomy matters; as subjects whose initiative matters to solve unforeseen problems, to communicate with the other in new forms of work organisation and modes of production. We need to monitor how the notion of productivity will evolve. Will it ignore subjects' creativity and cut itself off from a reflexive vision of the work place of the future, or will it integrate people's creativity and reflexive power as a way to depart from the cul-de- sac of repetitive tailored work organisations?

Of course such a trend is not without contradictions and ambiguities. How do you get people involved in improving techniques of production without giving them their fair share of the results from the increase in productivity? A give and take is inevitable.

Moreover, the trend indicating an increase in the learning demand, cannot ignore other company policies and strategies relying on rationalisation of jobs rather than on supporting internal mobility and flexibility (Bandt, Dejours and Dubar 1995; Aronowitz and DiFazio 1994). The jobs crisis, rather than the end of work (Rifkin 1995) is the other side of the knowledge economy and learning enterprises (Meda and Shor 1998). Too many enterprises still rely more on external flexibility - relying on a burst of activity in malleable subcontracting (Reich 1991:91), on laying off and rehiring people. They reject as risky the new trend towards internal or 'dynamic' flexibility which relies on expansion of lifelong learning and on active policies of the labour market.

Indeed the labour market in all post industrial countries is now strongly fragmented beyond a smaller and smaller hard core of regular full time safe jobs (with the gold watch given at the end, just before enjoying complementary pension plan). We observe the emergence of many forms of insecure employment status: full time but contractual; regular but part-time; hired on short-term contracts; working without contracts and so on. What is important to grasp here is that participation in organised learning is very unevenly distributed within these new national segmented labour markets. The chance

to benefit from a firm's financed training is almost nil if you are not in the inner circle of permanent employment. All the people with precarious work status, a majority of them women, have to finance themselves as a number of them are doing, to go on with their learning life. Though advances are being made in many countries for specific target groups having lost jobs, the learning demand of the majority of employed people, thus having still a job, remains poorly answered. There is an urgent need to look at ways to promote adult learning among this majority, not only as a prevention measure but also as a way to strengthen the economy from within and where it counts: in the competency of people.

The significance of the economic drive towards life long learning is multi-dimensional. If corporations tend more and more to invest in adult learning, and this is good news – individuals too, insecure about their future at the work place and eager to improve their conditions of life are claiming their right to go on learning. For all of us, the right to learn has become necessary to update and enlarge our skills and through this, to protect in a flexible market place, our right to find, keep and improve our jobs. Economically justified as an investment, the right to learn stands on its own. The right to learn, the right to time-sharing, the right to receive support for tuition fees, support for transport, for learning materials, for childcare, are needed for the continued development of people's competencies. The right to decent and enabling working conditions that encourage active participation and initiative, that recognise people's intelligence, that support informal learning and inter-learning, that help subjects to fulfil themselves in their own work is now a condition for the building of learning organisations. This is in turn a condition for sustainable economic development. This new possible convergence between economic necessity and people's right to self-development opens the door for a possible breakthrough, but with certain conditions.

Something sure, the right to learn of the growing percentage of the active population hired in precarious circumstances, who do not benefit from the advantages of regular full-time staff or the special programmes for the unemployed, will become a big concern in the second generation of national adult learning policies.

A final remark on this first point. People are ready to invest their private time to join sessions and to study on their own. People are ready to negotiate the constraints that their participation in adult learning brings to their life partners and children. People are ready to invest their own money to cover part of the costs. Where is the give and take if governments and firms, who will benefit from it, do not join in this national effort required by our knowledge intensive economies? The right to learn during one's working life, not only after lay-off when it is too late, requires individual financial support and free time. This issue, in most countries, is still insufficiently addressed. We can already see that it will become another big question to be debated during the next decade.

(2) Rising learning aspirations outside the area of work

But this rising demand for collective intelligence is not reduced to the work place. The development of skills and knowledge does not stop at the doorsteps of industry. There is a rising social demand to liberate people's creative potential outside the world of work. Through community education, in popular education, and through general adult education, more and more people are searching to improve their capacity to act in all areas: in health, about alcoholism in their immediate surroundings, in parental relations, in the environment, in monitoring the rise of cancer around some industrial compound, in checking the water quality, in local governance, in managing community

organisations and organising one's union or association, in learning new ways of cooking and new eating habits, in learning how to take care of people with a handicap, in learning computers or a second or third language, in learning new creative skills like music, painting, photography, dance etc, in learning how to write and illustrate a family history and print that beautiful gift in 50 copies for the children and grandchildren.

The same is true of the diverse forms of literacy and basic education initiatives, in their contribution to improve people's life conditions, their health, their autonomy, their right to a decent job and the recognition and enjoyment of their human dignity.

All these various and numerous learning events and initiatives taking place every day and evening in all cities and villages, are making silently and profoundly, a huge difference in our society. This large-scale and extremely diverse learning creativity, experienced and lived in a thousand discussion and learning groups around the country constitutes a fantastic investment in this society's capacity to solve many of its problems, to tackle on its own many challenges, to move ahead in so many areas, to grow from within, to become reflexive. Such a wide-spread liberation of the right to learn in so many areas of activity (personal development, ecology, physical fitness, computers, practical subjects, social problems etc.) has become a necessary condition to build a participatory welfare state; the only one possible, between a return to full liberalism or the slow collapse of passive unidirectional welfare state. A study by the World Bank, not published because of fear by the Bank's management that it would raise too much learning demand among the adult population, has gathered during 20 years evidence of the positive return on investment in non-work related informal education and adult learning: In health, on the impact of parents' involvement on the initial education of their children, on sustainable changes in hygienic conditions and drinking and eating habits, on inter-ethnic coexistence etc.

Peace is too important to leave diplomacy to diplomats only and not have us as citizens, learn the skills of grass-root diplomacy for helping resolve conflicts in equitable and sustainable ways. Is this an investment in luxury? Health is too important and risky today to leave entirely in the hands of an overloaded and under financed health system and professionals, and not to rely also on the competency of each of us learning about our body, about the impact of daily environment, about prevention measures, if not also about the capacity to cross-check and question diagnoses. This right to learn and question will save more money than all the savings or cuts that governments can make. The rehabilitation of prisoners is also too important to limit it to welfare reintegration measures only and not rely mainly in the right of detainees to learn trades and social skills, and thus increase as data suggests, the rate of successful re-integration. I could also speak of the right to learn of the older population as an instrumental right to their autonomy and dignity, as a way to unleash the creativity and productivity of this growing and fascinating new age.

Moreover, and this is the second point I would like to make here, there is an inevitable cumulative effect between work and work related learning. A synergy is at work across all areas of adult learning, be it related to employment or to personal goals. Long-term investment in people's personal development does not become a pointless investment because it is not required in the short term by business. This is why the right to learn, the possibility to claim our right to go on developing ourselves, is also from an economic perspective, a tool to protect the long term investment typical in both the health and education domains.

Community education, the Cinderella of adult learning policies, is thus an investment as important as the more visible and currently more protected work-related education

and training domain. Both are crucial, and claiming the right to both is a way to ensure sustainable and cumulative outcomes both in people's individual biography and in the building of active learning societies.

To oppose as competitive areas formal and non formal education, work and non-work related adult learning, child literacy and adult literacy, flower arrangement and technical training is, from an investment perspective and from the perspective of life long engineering *depassé*, as outdated as opposing curative and preventative health strategies.

It is not by chance that half of the recommendations of the summits held in the 90s; Rio, Beijing, Copenhagen and the others, dealt with both formal and adult education measures. Popular education, the diffusion of the capacity for initiative, development of competencies, as well as the universalisation of initial comprehensive schooling of children that makes adult learning more possible throughout life, have become key elements of all the alternative scenarios in all areas: gender justice, social development and alleviation of poverty, population, environment etc.

We cannot wait 30 years for this competent citizenship and this creative labour force to happen. That is the time it would take if we relied, as before, on the education of the next generation through child schooling. We cannot wait 30 years to improve people's capacity to get involved in the protection and rehabilitation of their environment. We cannot wait even five or ten years. Nearly 90% of the adult population of 2007 have already today left school. It is in the two current generations of adults that investments are needed.

Ireland, together with Australia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Flanders, and the Nordic countries is, contrary to North America, giving a prominent place to publicly supported community education in its national policy of 2000. It refuses, for instance in the new National Qualifications Authority, to create artificial divides between areas of learning.

It is important in times of economic constraint to consolidate the right to popular and community education by demonstrating the cumulative character of the different learning events in people's biography, by exposing the cost of not doing it on a large scale, by showing the synergy it creates with work related education. The 'flower arrangement syndrome' of past discourse does not stand anymore in front of all the evidence coming from research and more importantly the daily experiences of people. Ask your ministers, ask yourselves if to learn something at the workplace forbids you to use it at home, or if to learn something for their or your personal development, like a second language or computer literacy, forbids you to benefit from it at the workplace. The economy of lifelong learning has to be reconstructed.

(3) The difficult expression of learning aspirations and negotiation of the learning demand among the adult population.

One of the specific difficulties of adult learning is to be found far upstream from any learning process, in what I call the expression of the learning demand. You see, before an adult has the courage or motivation to knock at the door of a learning centre, or to approach the new much needed guidance service, many things are happening in his head.

For an adult, the decision to learn or continue learning is always a difficult one. It takes time and a special context for such a decision to be formed, to come out. It implies that this person sees learning as beneficial to improve their condition of life. It implies that they think they will complete a programme or session and succeed. No one likes to fail, more so if they have before, earlier in life with a negative schooling experience.

That is the reason why it takes so much time to create conditions where people can finally express their implicit aspirations and needs. It takes years to create in a local community, an ambience that facilitates such individual decisions, that overcomes the cultural barriers and the fear attached to any organised learning context. To invest in the creation of such a learning environment at local and national levels through the media takes time and remains fragile. It would be tragic if budget cuts, even for a few years, would destroy the cumulative building of these upstream conditions for the development of adult learning. The right to learn could not be exercised without these upstream long-term measures, without the creation of a climate where the capacity for initiatives is largely diffused, so as to awaken curiosity and support the emergence of a felt-need to join learning events.

To those who might say that we have enough demand already on our hands and that we don't need to contribute more to a larger expression of it, I would ask them to put themselves in the shoes of those for which they will thus decide. I would ask: 'What is more risky - to have a temporary crisis in coping with the increasing demand, or to hinder the capacity of a society to solve its problems?'

A second dimension of the expression of the learning demand is the inevitable negotiation between the external demand of an organisation or a society asking persons to participate in specific learning, and the subjective aspirations and experiences of individuals. Well, the right to learn will mean in future not only access to learning, but also the right to negotiate the learning project and determine the subjects. And this right of a person to have a say on their body will require new mechanisms and mediations at the work place, in the community, in literacy programmes, in community education.

The media is the message: How can we develop adult learning in order to help people become more autonomous actors and do it without giving them the possibility to negotiate their intimate learning life? Indeed spaces are needed where people can explore their learning dreams, can verbalise their learning aspirations, make them heard and thus improve and even transform the external educational requests.

(4) Inequalities in Lifelong Learning: A critical question

The trend towards a reproduction of inequality in the prevailing provision of adult learning is known. The participation in adult learning tends to privilege people with higher initial education, people working in large enterprises, people under 50. It tends to concentrate financial support on individuals in regular full time jobs. Those who have, get more. The correction of this dominant trend is complex.

Still today, a great number of adults are left to their own devices to deal with economic upsets and to learn for themselves to survive, to master on their own a second or a third language, to learn to participate in a complex urban environment in order to cope in an increasingly computerised daily existence.

I would like to make four short remarks: First, the factors and conditions that hinder or

reinforce this trend are now better understood (Belanger and Doray 2001; Gaudart 2000; Delgoulet 2000; Jackson 2000; Witerich 1999; Hirata and Rogerat 1988). Many experiences have shown that the prevailing trend can be reversed. Research on how funding regimes affect the recruitment of those traditionally excluded point to the importance of public policy and public interventions (Tuijnman 1999). But general strategies are not effective when it comes to recruiting disadvantaged groups because the traditionally strong groups are prompt at consuming the available learning resources. Even organisations with pronounced ambitions to reach disadvantaged groups end up with provision that unintentionally corresponds best to the demands of the advantaged (McIntyre, Brown and Ferrier 1996; Nordhaug 1991). Without funding earmarked for targeted strategies like outreach policies and special support, we will not correct the ongoing reproduction of inequalities (Rubenson 1996).

My second remark has to do with initial education. The right to learn throughout life cannot be accomplished unless people receive in their early years, a long and comprehensive initial education. The probability to go on learning in adult life is, in Canada for example, seven times higher for a University graduate than for people with less than eight years of initial schooling. These sorcerer apprentices who want to transform education into a simple competitive market and who set the education of young people against that of adults, like two competing expenditures, refuse to acknowledge either the cumulative development of collective intelligence or the cumulative process of learning biographies. The first factor for participation in adult learning and for an active citizenry is a stimulating and prolonged initial education. Reciprocally, the success of initial education of children is extremely associated with the capacity of parents to support and accompany them.

My third remark is the importance in our advocacy work, of developing and testing the legal base people have to claim their right to learn. A movement at world level is rising to hold popular tribunals where people could, in the presence of human rights experts, express the cases of adults being denied their right to learn. Test cases will soon be brought in court not only for people with handicaps, though much needed, but also for all those adults who did not get, in the first part of their life, the opportunity to terminate their secondary education. Obligatory education means not only the obligation of children to attend school but also the obligation of governments to provide all citizens with nationally recognised basic education, not only those in extreme difficulty. The European Charter of Rights and the UN Convention on human rights stipulate, both of them, that discrimination on the basis not only of gender or religious beliefs, but also on the basis of age is prohibited. We have now the legal basis to claim that the right to basic education should know no discrimination based on age. The right to basic education is a lifelong right, that does not stop at one point in people's biography. The International Council is following closely this issue and would like its members to explore the possibility to organise popular tribunals, as we did in Montreal this year and will do in Port Alegre next February and where possible, to test a case in court. Either it is a right or it is not...

My last remark is about informal learning. Below the surface, one should find a much larger reality, the reality of self-learning, of informal learning, of people developing skills and knowledge through actions and observations, through personal reading, through informal discussion with colleagues, partners, friends. This informal learning life precedes, follows and accompanies organised learning events; it gives it significance, it integrates it in one's experience. But not all daily environments are conducive to such active informal learning. In this review of the right to learn, we have to recognise the learning misery of so many adults who are experiencing negative feedback daily, at home, at work, in their community, who are seeing their intellectual potential denied,

their right to question repressed, their dream of personal development ridiculed. Learning damage is as bad as physical damage. The right to learn is indeed the right to be recognised in both physical and mental capacities. It is the right to personal development, the right to participate creatively in the economy as well as the community; it is the right to the joy of learning.

Conclusion: The Collective Intelligence and the Right to Learn

In closing, I would like to suggest that we are entering not so much a knowledge intensive society, but a *creativity* intensive society. Through the silent exercise of the right to learn by a growing number of people in so many areas of learning, we are rediscovering the critical importance of collective intelligence (Brown and Lauder 2001; Levy 1995) beyond the economic sphere. Intelligence is not a scarce resource, an elitist gift, as was still believed in the 20th century. It is even less a faculty that will lose its energy over the course of life. Intelligence is a universal unlimited resource and, more than ever before, a universally required one.

Eliminating the obstacles to the flourishing of intelligence, curiosity and ingenuity throughout the life of every woman and man, is not a luxury. It is a deeply seated aspiration for human dignity and for creative participation. By having more and more people claiming and exercising their right to learn, we make more certain that the risk societies of today will have the capacity to survive and even to improve.

Yes the potential of life not yet lived is the greatest asset each individual has and that each society can tap into. Ireland has made great steps ahead over the past decade. We need this development to be pursued. We need the leadership of all northern small nations: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Ireland.

Thank You.

Imagining the Future

Investing in culture, or as Paul Bélanger called it the notion of 'collective intelligence', is the theme that I wish to explore with you this evening. I know it is a bit clichéd to say it, but I will start with 'the self' as many of us have started on our adult education journeys with 'the self' or with the ego. Right now I think that this is an important conference as it is the first *post - White Paper* Conference on Adult Education that I am aware of nationally, and it is also the first conference on Adult Education which is *post - Celtic Tiger* and I think that is significant. More than anything else, I see that all conferences are a time for a pause; they are a time when you take refuge from the urgent to concentrate on the important and the fact that the urgent will hit you tomorrow morning is neither here nor there. I don't think that this is so much a 'pause' conference for me but rather a 'menopause' conference. I believe that for many of us who grew up in the seventies and who are involved in Adult Education (and I am struck by the fact that a lot of people here I don't know, which is very reassuring), after twenty five years one begins to wonder about one's legacy. And I propose to start today by reflecting on the legacy of a generation involved in adult education and what that is into the future.

I am working now with eighteen year olds which is very interesting in that I have never worked with eighteen year olds before in my life. Now obviously the great body of students in Dundalk Institute of Technology are eighteen and nineteen year olds and I am intrigued that they have a different memory to mine. This is a generation of young people who don't remember the world without a mobile phone: They actually think the mobile phone was always there. They have also grown up with the Internet and they have no memory of a world without it. Whereas I remember a world without the motorcar; I remember when you actually knew the number of the doctor's motorcar, the vet's motorcar and maybe even the schoolmaster's motorcar. What I am saying is that we are working out of totally different memory sets and part of what one wonders about one's memory is to what extent it is of any use to the next generation; to what extent is that memory of any validity, value or purpose to a new generation and it is surprising to find out in a lot of instances that it is little enough.

So let me start with my memory regarding adult education in terms of my own story. I went to Maynooth as a staff member on the first of October 1979 which is a significant day in the annals of Maynooth history because it was the day the Pope arrived at Maynooth. In and around Maynooth at that time, there was a great sense in the seminary and amongst the clergy, that God was back in his rightful place and that the world would go on the way it had for the previous two hundred years and that Ireland was saved. It looked in 1979 like it might be taking the wrong course, but this visit was going to sort it out. Of course as often happens if you look back at history, significant events like the Papal visit were not so much a christening as a wake. It is interesting that the main choirmasters in the Papal visit included Eamon Casey and Michael Cleary. In a sense, it does tell a story because God had actually left Maynooth long before the Pope ever arrived there, and only insiders in Maynooth knew that and had decided not to let us know. Interestingly enough from the 1980s, Carl Rogers took over where God left off and a whole new set of idealism began to take hold in the Irish consciousness. The clerical church-based idealism was replaced gradually by a different kind of idealism, a different kind of conviction and a different kind of search, and I think it was a great privilege for adult education over the past twenty five years to actually have been in many cases, the vehicle of that search. It became the church process for a whole generation of idealists and took over where something else left off.

I am interested in that whole process in that, if it is the case that in the past twenty five years we invested a level of idealism in things, what was the result and what did we leave behind? I think part of what we were doing was investing in radicalism - the radicalism of the sixties - which was global in one sense and affected Ireland in the same way that it affected most places. Where in Ireland did we invest that radicalism? I think we have lived off it for the past twenty five years in different ways. I think we invested it partially in the Third World: A whole generation of young people worked for years in the Third World and came back with their own consciousness shaped by it. The poverty movement took hold in Ireland, a new analysis based on inequality took hold and took shape in the first poverty programme from 1975 to 1979. The community movement and community education and studies began to take on a new kind of momentum. But in my view probably the strongest legacy of that period is the women's movement. I think that of anything that will preside when we are all gone, the consciousness change (and I obviously comment on this from the outside), in women in Ireland has been the single biggest change.

It is incredible to think that the other thing eighteen year olds don't remember is the Berlin Wall. We grew up with the Berlin Wall and it had a definitiveness to it. It was so definitively present, that the notion that it only took one night for it and everything it symbolised to be taken apart is incredible. A whole Marxist/Leninist philosophy crumbled in the movements that took over Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. In the 1960s I walked around St. Flannan's in Ennis, as a lot of us did, with Mao's little red book and many of us were looking at these kinds of theories, looking at the exposition of new kinds of radicalism and new kinds of cultural transformations, and it hasn't survived. As I said I really strongly believe that the very profound change of consciousness in women, which so differentiates the life of the modern woman from the life of her mother, more than anything else is the presiding legacy of that period. That legacy is being reflected not just in consciousness change. It is being reflected increasingly I think in legislative change and crucially institutional structures. 54% of the population of third level students in Ireland now are female which means that 46% are male. All of the high status occupations with the exception of architecture now have a predominance of females. If we look at any society and see how over time a society improves its own social and economic positioning and power, we will invariably find that this was preceded by a lengthy period of success in education. I believe that the long term impact of what has happened for women on institutional, political and decision making structures in Ireland has yet to be actually fully experienced and fully appreciated.

I am also interested in the human development agenda. It is related to the women's movement but not entirely connected into it, because with it and with local history there has been a search for identity which has also characterised Irish adult education over the last twenty five years. It is a search which has been driven by a whole new way in which people need to know their place. The notion of knowing your place is a very interesting ambivalence in the Irish psyche and can actually mean a couple of things: It can mean you have a memory, you know where you come from, you know who your relatives are, you know where you fit in a long line of descendants. Identity in that sense is relatively stable and relatively well secured and well established; it is largely inherited. But in a changing society identity is increasingly not inherited and people do not know their place and not knowing their place has a disorientating quality to it. 'I do not know who I am.' But it also has its liberating qualities because knowing your place is a major put down in the Irish psyche as well. So actually refusing to know your place is an interesting agenda in creating identity. Adult Education has been part of that agenda; getting to know your place and renegotiating it simultaneously and into the future. This interests me because I am looking at significant and increasing numbers of

immigrants in Ireland: 'How will they know their place?' is one question. Maybe a bigger question is 'How will we know our place as we share our identity with people who are not necessarily born here and with the whole notion in a new Ireland of otherness and foreignness?' These are issues that are going to challenge us in the most fundamental way into the future.

From here on in then, where are we headed? When Anderson talks about postmodernism or the options for postmodernism, he really talks about three kinds of options; the constructivist, the player and the nihilist. I think these are interesting concepts and I think the generation that I have been referring to was a generation of constructivists who were driven by ideas and convictions. They were buttressed all the time by the fact that there was usually an opposite conviction that they could rail against. In that regard of course the clerical legacy was very useful but interestingly enough, I have a sense of a new generation emerging in Ireland which is more characterised by nihilism than by constructivism. Certainly I have a sense of a contested space. And the contest now is not between one conviction and another conviction, but is between conviction and a lack of conviction.

I think this fault line in Irish society is best dramatised in the television comedy 'Father Ted.' There is one particular episode in 'Father Ted' that I think captures it brilliantly, because it positions the two iconic characters of this divide in opposite places on the television screen. On the constructivist side, the icon of our generation - those over the age of forty, is Sinead O'Connor. In everything that she is, she oozes conviction and if she doesn't ooze conviction she also oozes anger, search, pain and... it's all out there. She is a wonderful expression I think of a generation in Ireland, a generation that used a lot of its pain and oppression to give a whole new meaning to their own identity and their own sense of being. Then there is Dougal who is the archetype of the nihilist. One night a Sinead lookalike was railing against the ills and the oppression of Catholicism and she was complaining about patriarchy, oligarchy and the hierarchy. Dougal looks at her on television and he looks at Ted and he says: 'What is she always going on about, this Catholicism thing? Isn't it all a bit of gas?' And in a way he basically just rubbishes it all.

That is part of the challenge I think now in Irish society. I do believe there is a challenge of nihilism but I don't know what it means or how extensive it is. I think engaging a new generation around the notion of ideas, convictions or social process is becoming more problematic. I think it is becoming more problematic because I am working with a generation of young people who are not particularly driven by political ideas; they are driven largely by the culture of 'commodification.' Once everything, including education and qualifications, becomes a label or a commodity this is actually what young people understand, and the power of the market economy is massive. I think what I have learned in my life, if I may sound patronising on this, is that young people who are driven by conviction at eighteen tend in this generation to be driven largely by the same kind of convictions thirty years later. If that is true there is an interesting thirty years down the road in this society.

Having said all that then, what are the challenges apart from nihilism that we might be trying to deal with? I think that there are several for the future: The first is the process of *globalisation* and what that means. Associated with globalisation we are looking at *postmodernism* or in a sense, the break down of the meta-narrative and the emergence of new kinds of identities, the emergence of whole notions of diversity and difference and we are looking at environmental depletion. I want to say two things about environmental depletion: I think it impacts at two levels. It is obviously increasingly impacting at the level of the physical, whether it is global warming or the depletion of

topsoil. There is a depletion of the capital resource, the base on which society, the economy and life depends. The other kind of depletion that I want to mention is cultural depletion. This is the depletion of social capital; I think this an important notion to place in front of you this evening. If I was asked now what is the social purpose of adult education I would say it is to somehow tackle the depletion of the cultural resource in Irish society. This depletion - just as it is difficult to see topsoil being depleted unless it is happening in a very explicit way - of social capital is also a very invisible, and for that reason a pretty sinister process. One example that comes to mind that I sometimes talk about now is the life of a child.

I am increasingly interested in how a baby experiences life - a baby from the age of say six months to four years. How do we construct an environment for that child that is enriching? Now oddly enough I think Ireland knew how to do this in an unreflective way formerly. One of the ways we knew how to do it was having lots of kids because if you put nine of them together in the same house, well, social capital nearly happens around you - there isn't a lot you can do about it! In the street I think for instance of that wonderful nursery rhyme 'Ring a Ring a Rosie.' It is interesting now to ask in our daily life as we walk the streets of Dublin, or any street in any town, when did we last see a group of kids playing 'Ring a Ring a Rosie.' If we think about what they did: they all had to hold hands; they moved in tandem with each other in rhythm; they learned a bit about history and the great bubonic plague; they learned how to cooperate and they sat down with everybody else; all in 'Ring a Ring a Rosie'. Increasingly now with the way Irish life has evolved, it is very difficult for a two year old to negotiate a game of 'Ring a Ring a Rosie' with another nine two year olds - you would nearly have to get on the Internet to set it up!

There is in a sense a collapse of social spontaneity which has happened in the way we are structuring life in modern Ireland: The way we have set about the structures and instituting it, the way in which we organise work, the way in which we organise housing and the way in which we organise housing estates - the way we even use the word 'childcare' as opposed to child development. This is where the whole concept of commodification comes into play: We are increasingly going to find in our society that we have a culture that people want to buy, and as James Joyce put it 'if he had a mother to sell he would go down on his bended knees and thank Christ.'

Where else are we going? There are other issues that we have to address in adult education. The area of active citizenship for example. I know what active citizenship means and it doesn't just mean people getting on 'The Late Late Show', and I do think that this is increasingly something that we have to learn in this society: Access to the media is a different kind of citizenship to access to decision making. We have made some progress on active citizenship around participatory models of state, especially where we have engaged with the activist as opposed to with clients. We have engaged with them in new ways over the past ten to fifteen years. I think those of us in adult education never fully realised how good the Irish state is at learning things; it is extraordinarily good. It is partially because it is small, it is partially because we actually meet in conferences like this - people who are activists and people who are decision makers - but one way or another, we are extremely good as a state at learning how to do things.

We have learned a lot about active citizenship, but there are some things we have yet to learn. I would like to tell you about a programme I did with a group of 20 to 24 young Traveller women in Navan two years ago, all of whom had grown up to adulthood in Ireland in the nineties. There were two features that were striking about them: One was that none of them had ever completed second level education in

Ireland and the other that only two of them had ever got there. This happened in the last ten years. To the best of my knowledge there has never been a Traveller trained as a primary teacher in Ireland. I don't know if there has ever been a Traveller trained as a nurse in Ireland but I am pretty certain there was never a Traveller trained to be doctor in Ireland. So here are key professionals, key influencers, key role models and we know what active citizenship is... and we wonder why they are not with us more? There are obvious things that should be done in terms of reserving places in third level education especially for people from disadvantaged and minority groups. Any competition, any entrance requirement that is based on competition is going to impact negatively on the disadvantaged - the points system does it; the entire arrangement for entry into third level does it. You can only begin to deal with it by allocating quotas and I am certain that in Alabama this would not happen. Can you imagine in Alabama if there was no black teacher? I think that is what active citizenship increasingly means: It just doesn't mean people being able to give voice to their oppression. It also means getting entry and positioning in policy and decision-making in the key places in Irish society and at the moment we really have a long way to go on a social class basis.

In terms of our new agenda, I do believe very strongly that one of the things that we learned in the last past twenty-five years was how to do education well. I think adult education and those involved in it have known more about good learning and education than any other sector in Irish education. That is an assertion that can't be proven, but it is my belief. We have not succeeded in ensuring that the other systems have learned enough in terms of the application of what we have learned. The other systems have managed to remain not only apart but quizzical, and still wondering if there is a convincing job to be done. I think that is true at all levels particularly second level education. I think second level education is characterised in Ireland by a very high level of alienation by everybody involved in it, by teachers and students. Not everywhere, and there is a lot of good work going on in different places, schools and in VECs - I want to make that absolutely clear. But they are working in an overall context the individual teacher or school can actually do very little about because it is predefined and predetermined. It is based on delivery - it is essentially the educational equivalent to the post office - a delivery system of education. It is characterised by hierarchy, with everyone in it disclaiming responsibility. It is also based on instruction rather than construction, on this notion there is a *majesterium* of truth and we will pass it on whether it is good for you or not. In that context I question the extent to which second level education is actually depleting the cultural base of the society in which we live.

Whether it is or it is not, we are looking at an economic requirement into the future, looking at a requirement for competitiveness whether we like it or not. We seem in Ireland to have managed to bridge the two; to bridge the concern for human development with the competitiveness concern. One way or another, it is interesting to say that one of the other things about the memory of an eighteen year old is that they don't remember poverty. They actually don't remember the 1980s (and many of us have tried to forget them) but these young people were born in them and don't remember them. One of the striking things in the media at the moment with the economy is the sense that the adult generation has such a strong memory of the 80s, not just of the economic problems that beset the country, but of the problem of self confidence that hit the country. I recall Gay Byrne every morning saying: 'Why would you stay here? You'd want to be crazy to stay in this country,' and out of that we managed to create the 1990s. This is the first time in two hundred years that Irish society has been able to provide a living for everyone born on the island - an extraordinary achievement by this particular generation. For the first time young people are growing up in Ireland feeling they are successful. In the community education sector, one of the challenges is to learn the language of success because

we don't have it in our lexicon. Its like remembering James Joyce's great line, 'The only great contribution of the Celts to Europe was the whinge!' We actually in Ireland have to learn what it means to have a language of success but the problem is it might be too late because the big concern in people's minds is that we are going back to where we always were.

What are the issues and the emerging agenda? I think the economy is going to become an issue for us. It is going to become an issue in different ways. I will illustrate this with a personal story. The year before I went to Dundalk, there were fifty IDA itinerary visits to Dundalk that year. Since I have been there, there have been four. So if we think that economic development is what happens five years from now on the basis of decisions made today, then we are looking at potentially fairly serious economic problems emerging in Ireland in the next ten to fifteen years. How we are positioned to think our way through them, having thought our way through one crisis, is going to be a massive challenge for us and so in a sense, the cultural agenda also has an economic purpose.

I want to leave with you this notion: If in adult education we can learn to think our way through problems, then we are still making a contribution. Its just that the problems of the next twenty years might be different to those of the last twenty.